



## Is Your Business Prepared for Fire?

As Australia's climate gets dryer the risk of bushfires increases each year. With more Victorians living and working in bushland areas it is more important than ever to plan for fires and make sure your business can survive and recover quickly. The information in this section will help you put together a bushfire response plan for your business.

### How well would your business deal with a fire?

Use this checklist to assess how ready your business is to respond to an emergency.

Do you:

- have the right kind and right amount of insurance to cover losses to your business?
- have a bushfire response plan for your business that includes your responsibilities to staff and clients?
- know the trigger points for leaving early?
- know the bushfire response arrangements in your area?
- know who to contact in the event of a bushfire?
- have a policy to deal with interruptions to your business?
- have a risk management and emergency contingency plan for your business?

If you are able to answer 'yes' to all these questions and have updated your bushfire response plan recently your business is on the way to being prepared for an emergency. If you are unable to answer 'yes' to all these questions then you need to take action. The information in this section will help you understand what you need to do to prepare.

**Tip:** speak to your local council and emergency services about bushfire response arrangements in your area.

### What is essential to your business in case of a fire?

Every business requires different assets (staff, equipment, stock, premises, clients, suppliers, etc) to run successfully. It's important to know how your business would be affected if any of these assets were damaged or temporarily unavailable in the event of a bushfire.



Tourism Victoria's 'Crisis Essentials Guide' to preparing for, responding to, and recovering from a crisis is a good resource for all businesses, but of particular interest to those in the tourism industry.

**Tip:** a fireproof safe is a good investment for storing business records. If you store records electronically, consider using an online backup service or making hard copies on CD or DVD that can be stored in the safe.

### **Preparing a bushfire response plan**

As a business owner it is your responsibility to make sure you, your staff and clients are safe in the event of a fire. A clear and concise bushfire response and emergency plan that your staff know how to use will go a long way to making sure they are safe. The Melbourne Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFB) provides training courses in emergency planning for businesses. Visit the MFB website for further details.

If you live in any at-risk area, join your local Community Fireguard group or attend a Fire Ready meeting in your local community. Meeting information is available from the Country Fire Authority (CFA) website.

Write down your bushfire response and emergency plan and practice it. Make sure to include a back-up plan. Use the following checklist to prepare a plan for your business:

#### **Decisions to make**

- decide how to prepare the property for a bushfire. (review the MFB's Workplace safety information visit the CFA website)
- decide who will be in charge during a fire or an evacuation
- decide on evacuation routes and emergency assembly sites. Make sure to include routes and information for special needs and culturally and linguistically diverse groups, including visitors or tourists
- decide how and who will communicate with employees and visitors during a fire
- decide how and who will check that records and other business assets are safe
- discuss with employees pay entitlements and leave arrangements should they be stood down or told not to report to work because of a fire threat.



## Things to do

- have an emergency kit which includes first-aid and supplies for up to three days. Make sure employees know where it is
- identify staff who have first-aid qualifications and train further staff if needed
- have a list of contact details for staff members, including their emergency contact person
- identify which staff have the skills to help in an emergency, e.g. able to keep calm in a crisis
- talk to emergency service providers such as police, fire and ambulance services along with and other agencies such as VICSES and VicRoads to find out what they will want you to do during a fire

## Bushfire Response and Recovery

In the event of a bushfire that is likely to affect your business:

1. Activate your emergency plan early and stick to it
2. Follow the advice of emergency services
3. Stay informed and keep your clients and staff informed
  - listen to ABC Local Radio - Victoria's official emergency broadcaster
  - ring the Victorian Bushfire Information Line on 1800 240 667
  - visit the CFA or DSE websites for up to date information on bushfires and emergency response programs

## New telephone warnings

A new telephone-based warning system will also be used to issue warnings to communities if there is an emergency, including a fire.

You may receive a text message to your mobile or a voice message to your landline phone. When a message is issued it will go to all phones linked to properties in a designated area by billing address (not your actual location at a given time).

## Don't rely on receiving a message

You must still prepare and have an action plan ready even if you haven't received an official message.

If you live in an area that has a mobile 'black spot' it's important to have a landline phone. The landline phone should not be cordless because it won't work if you lose your electricity supply.



If you receive a warning, act on its advice. If you don't understand the message ask family, friends or neighbours for help.

Unless you urgently need emergency services (police, fire or ambulance) don't call 000 for information. Call the Victorian Bushfire Information Line on 1800 240 667 (TTY 1800 122 969).

### **Livestock, pets and other animals**

If your business involves larger animals you should prepare a livestock fire plan. The Department of Primary Industries (DPI) has information about livestock fire plans on its website. Businesses involving smaller animals (such as vets, pet stores and animal shelters) should consider them in the business fire plan.

### **Recovering from a bushfire**

If your business has been affected by a bushfire its recovery will depend on many factors, some of which may be beyond your control. It's important to focus on what you can do to improve your business' chances of a quick recovery and make sure you're prepared in advance.

Keep accurate records of your income tax and BAS statement, as well as financial statements such as profit and loss, cashflow and balance sheets. Keep these records up-to-date and store them with other essential information in a fireproof safe or off the premises entirely.

The CPA Australia Disaster Recovery Toolkit is a comprehensive guide to recovering from a fire and includes information on:

- how to analyse the financial health of business after disaster
- how to develop a Business Continuity Plan
- how to undertake Business Impact Analysis
- government assistance available to business
- taxation issues emerging from disaster

**Tip:** Record all your personal and business information and store a copy off the premises, e.g. with your power of attorney. Use the Critical Information List on as a template.

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